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584 The Lesghian peoples can all boast of an elaborate engagement procedure. Were we to describe the ceremonies of each of the Lesghian peoples and tribes individually, we could easily fill a complete volume, but a volume with countless repetitions. We shall, therefore, limit ourselves again to what we may call a *typical* Lesghian engagement. Allowing for accidental differences, it is the kind of matchmaking and betrothal one finds among all Lesghians. These ceremonies have been described especially well by Kovalevskij in his *Zakon i obyčaj na Kavkazě*, L'vov, "Domašnjaja i semejnaja žizn Dagestanskich gorcev avarskago plemeni," Omarov, "Kak živut Laki," Gabiev, "Laki, ich prošloe i byt," and Dubrovin, *Istorija vojny i vladičestva russkich na Kavkazě.*

A Lesghian engagement is a long, drawn-out affair, lasting for months or even years,[15] yes, even for a decade or two.[16]

The suitor usually takes the first step himself: he invites the father of his prospective bride to dinner and secretly tries to discover the father's attitude toward such a match.[17]

Soon after that, the hopeful suitor sends a matchmaker to the girl's father. The matchmaker is usually a woman[18] (sometimes the mother or sister of the groom), but sometimes a man is sent instead;[19] and sometimes two matchmakers are sent instead of one.[20] Matchmakers are soon recognized as such by their unusual eloquence and unexpected eulogies.[21] "There is a certain young man, with an incomparable character. He is brave beyond description. And, of course, he is well-to-do. He is a man of reliability. In a word, he possesses all the qualities any and every Lesghian values." Then follows the practical application: "What a blessing it would be if this young gentleman would (Allah granting) become the husband of such a wonderful girl as is your daughter. Can you think of a better match?" But no matter how eager the parents of the girl may be to give her in marriage to this particular "superman," etiquette demands that this part of the premarital arrangements end in excuses and objections: "Oh, you see, our daughter is still so young! And besides, how could we get along without her. You realize the decision is very difficult. Please, let us think the matter over."

Some time later, the girl's parents consent to the marriage, the usual formula being, "Insha-Allah", i. e., "If it please Allah; if Allah so will!"[22]

Now that the girl's parents, especially her father, have no objections to the marriage, the suitor's task is to become acceptable to the girl and her family, and without gifts such a task would be impossible.

584 431 The next part of courtship is called *suknikari.*[23] The matchmaker brings the girl a ring, some clothes, and money. The *suknikari* is a very important

[15] Gabiev, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
[16] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 181.
[17] "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," SSKG, VIII (1875), p. 41.
[18] Kovalevskij, *l. c.*
[19] "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," *l. c.*; L'vov, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[20] "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," p. 31.
[21] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, pp. 562 f.
[22] L'vov, *l. c.*
[23] The first visit of the matchmakers was called *sukni* (in Dargwa).

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event in every Lesghian's life, for if these gifts are accepted, the consent of the parents of the girl is considered final.[24]

The next step consists mainly in an exchange of gifts.

Some days later, the mother of the young man visits the girl's family, bringing with her four loaves of bread and a ram,[25] a large copper basin, clothing, one silver and one golden ring. On accepting the gifts the girl puts the rings on her fingers. This visit of the mother of the groom constitutes the essential part of the engagement: from this moment the two young people are considered engaged.[26] In return the bride's family give the future groom's mother two loaves of bread, a slaughtered ram, and some small coins.

In the near future the fiancée must pay a visit to her parents-in-law. The groom-to-be, however, must absent himself on this occasion. She again receives various gifts: cloth, rings, ear-rings, and a vessel.[27]

Several days later the young man, in turn, pays a visit to his fiancée's family. Now it is the girl's turn to be absent. A small feast is prepared, and the suitor presents the family with some cloth and a slaughtered ram.[28]

The exchange of gifts must continue, vessels, cloth, rams, money, and pastries being the usual gifts. The suitor generally selects holydays as most appropriate for his visits and bestowals. There is especially the *khinki arkhul* which consists of pastries, cloth, an eviscerated ram, six large loaves of bread, and a large cast-iron vessel not less than 16 pounds in weight. These gifts are brought to the fiancée by two male and two female relatives of the suitor. In return the girl sends her future husband some silk cloth and two belts, and a necklace for his sister.[29]

Some time before the wedding, various materials are brought to the future bride, such as hemp, which she must prepare for use in her future home. Two or three years later, she receives 30 or 40 sheep-skins or 9—10 rams. In return she offers some cloth and belts.

The final bestowal of engagement gifts takes place several months later when two men and two women betake themselves to the bride-to-be, this time with one live and one slaughtered sheep, six large loaves of bread, three pieces of clothing of which one is silk, and, finally, a piece of cloth.

The last act of the engagement drama takes place shortly before the wedding. Three to ten relatives of the future bridegroom go to the family of the young lady, where they prepare the *khalba* and for this purpose they bring six pounds of butter and one measure of flour, while the girl's relatives provide other food. This feast is held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays and usually lasts a day or two. On this occasion two reliable persons representing

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[24] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, pp. 181 f.

[25] In Upper Kaitago (in Gank, Gansh, Myura) the groom's sister may come instead of his mother. AJuDO, p. 41.

[26] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 182: "Rěšajuščim aktom v dělě svatovstva javljaetsja vstuplenie materi ženicha v dom roditelej nevěsty s četyr'mja bol'šimi chlebami..."

[27] *ibid.*

[28] In some places the suitor's visit precedes that of the fiancée. Cf. "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," p. 41.

[29] Kovalevskij, *l. c.*

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584 [431] the future groom and two others representing the bride-to-be conclude a formal written contract regarding the *kebin*.[30]

The SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS. Southwest of Daghestan is the province known as Sakataly. A brief description of the Ingiloi betrothal customs will give us a good idea of the entire country bordering Southwestern Daghestan. The matchmaking is carried out by a representative of the suitor and a near relative of the mother of the girl, who, after a preliminary discussion, informs the mother that, "a certain person sent me to you with a little request. He would like to marry your daughter. The young man is truly of a noble character and well-to-do. I advise you to give your consent." Just as among the Chechens and Lesghians, the matchmaker will not receive a favourable answer at once. Only at the third visit is a decision reached, provided that within a definite time the family of the suitor can furnish a piece of silk, a silver ring, a ram, 10 loaves of bread, two liters of nuts, 15 or more eggs, 3 measures of apples, and two pails of wine. On the appointed day the bride-groom's matchmaker and one of his relatives bring these things to the girl's family. When the groom's intermediary arrives, he announces, "All these things were sent by Mr. X to win the favour of your daughter. May God grant them both luck and health, and may He also grant the same to you." Then the ram, which was brought by the matchmaker, is slaughtered; the cloth, ring, and money are received by the mother of the girl; the ring is placed on the girl's finger, from which moment she is regarded as definitely engaged. Similar feasts and gifts must follow. It is worthy of note that it is the mother who receives the gifts, the father having pratically nothing to do in the whole engagement ceremony. A final visit, and then the day of the marriage is agreed upon.[31]

To arrange a marriage in Pshavia usually takes about two years. The first discussions between the two families are a mere formality, but a formality that is strictly insisted upon, as it is elsewhere among the mountain peoples of the Caucasus. When the girl's parents finally give their consent, the so-called *agreoba* takes place: that is, bread is broken, distributed among the bride's relatives, and then eaten together with salt as a sign of friendship and betrothal. From this moment the two young people are considered engaged,[32] and the suitor's family is obliged to offer the girl's relatives an engagement gift. About a hundred years ago, according to Eristov,[33] it amounted to one ruble twenty kopeks. Among the Khevsurs it was only 20 kopeks.[34] After some time the future groom is obliged to visit his fiancée's family, and he and his friends are given a feast, but first the visitor must offer the *sakhlis sanakhavi* ("the visitation of the house"), which includes bread, meat, and drinks. The following day a

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[30] Dubrovin, I, i, p. 563.

[31] Cf. Fon-Plotto, "Priroda i ljudi Zakatal'skago Okruga," SSKG, IV (1871), pp. 30 f.

[32] Cf. Makalatija, "Iz starogo narodnogo byta Pšavov," SE, 1938, No. 1, pp. 103 ff.

[33] The Tushi have the same custom (Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 310).
"O Tušino-Pšavo-Chevsurskom Okruge," ZKO, III (1855), pp. 111 f. According to Makalatija, *l. c.*, Rs. 5 to Rs. 15.

[34] Dubrovin, 310.

sheep is slaughtered and a second feast is given at which the husband- and wife-to-be are present. The elder of the village *(khevis-beri)*[A], presides and then recites the special engagement prayer: "Glory to you, George, Angel of the Oak, Lasharis-Dzhbari, and Queen Tamara! George, Angel of the Oak, bless this young couple! Make them happy, rich and prosperous!" [35] After this the *mkepari*[36] are chosen from among the relatives of both partners, whose task it is to collect gifts for the betrothed. The Pshavs do not give their daughters a special dowry, these gifts and the *satavno* taking its place.[37] From now on the suitor is allowed to pay his future wife frequent visits.[38]

There is very little difference to be noted in the OSSETINE matchmaking and betrothal.[39] At first a good friend (generally a woman) of the young man's family is sent to the parents of the girl to learn, unnoticed if possible, about the possiblity of a marriage. If the "spy" returns with a favourable answer, two official matchmakers are sent, generally elderly friends of the family. All dealings are kept secret until the girl's father consents. The town-crier is then notified, for it is his duty and privilege to publicize all engagements. Then the matchmakers bring to the girl's family gifts and the *kalym*, and, as usual, the engagement is celebrated by a feast.[40]

The engagement customs of the KUMYKS are about the same as those of the Chechens.[41] In Balkaria it is the agreement regarding the *kalym* that constitutes the essence of the betrothal.[42]

2. Conclusions regarding Matchmaking and Betrothal

(1) All North Caucasians and immediate neighbours have the custom of formal betrothal of one sort or another. (2) Nowhere is the marriage arrangement a private affair. The two persons concerned are either passive, or if they do act, they are simply cooperating in a family matter. (3) Official go-betweens are usually employed. (4) The initiative is taken among all North Caucasians and neighbouring peoples by the male side. (5) Although the mother plays a surprisingly important part in the engagement customs, the final decision rests with the father.

The premarital arrangements of the Caucasians have a strongly patriarchal character. It is the father who has the final word in matchmaking. Moreover,

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[35] Makalatija, *l. c.* The sacred oak referred to is supposed to be on Mount Lashari in the central part of Pshavia and is tied to heaven with a golden chain (Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 103).

[36] Makalatija, *l. c.*

[37] Every girl, while still small, receives a calf as her own property. All the profit she makes by raising the calf becomes her property too.

[38] Makalatija, *l. c.*

[39] Dubrovin, I, i, pp. 329—332.

[40] Hahn, *Bilder aus dem Kaukasus*, pp. 40 f.

[41] For a fine description of Kumykian matchmaking and engagement see Semenov, "Očerki narodnych obyčaev Kumykov Terskoj Oblasti," *Terskij Sbornik*, II (1892), No. 2, Part 2 pp. 68—71; Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 637.

A. Karzulov, "Bolkari na Kavkaže," SMOMPK, XXXVIII (1908), No. 1, p. 146.

[A] [in Pshavia, southern Caucasia -- Analyst]